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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to compare the validity of two theories of interpersonal communication: (1) uncertainty reduction theory, based on the assumption that communication consists of attempts to reach a cognitive state of balance, and (2) coordinated management of meaning theory (CMM), based on the assumption that persons attempt to create a coordinated conversation coherent to each person and under their mutual control. Nine dialogues were developed to represent a first social meeting of two persons. Three types of information sequencing (derived from uncertainty reduction theory) and three levels of aligning actions (derived from CMM research) were manipulated in the dialogues. Each of 180 college students was asked to read one dialogue and rate the conversants on scales measuring six factors related to communication. The results did not support the hypothesized relationship between socially normative performance and positive evaluations derived from uncertainty reduction theory. They did support the perspective of CMM theory, which predicts a preference for conversants who show the ability to coordinate extranormative patterns of interaction. The data suggested a reciprocal relationship in which communication creates patterns of social order that may in turn be used by conversants to guide talk. (GT)

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SOCIAL ACTORS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE SOCIAL ORDER: A TEST OF TWO THEORETICAL VIEWS

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SOCIAL ACTORS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE SOCIAL ORDER: A TEST OF TWO THEORETICAL VIEWS

Recently, communication theorists have analyzed episodes of "initial interaction" as an arena in which the nature of communication may be revealed. According to most social scientific research, persons usually confine themselves to the exchange of relatively public demographic information. However, when we have shown transcripts of "normal" initial interactions to our students, their critiques of the participants' performance ranged from "fine" to "dull," and many have said something like "I'm glad that I don't have to spend time with either one of them." Could it be that perfectly appropriate performances in one of an actor's cultural "scripts" sometimes produces an unsatisfying episode? Or, do our dissatisfied students simply represent social abberrations--minor error variance in the flow of normal science? This paper confronts these questions by means of an empirical study comparing two theoretical perspectives which have reached separate and often contradictory answers. The issue seems more fundamental than we assumed when be began. The question addressed in this paper has evolved into: What is the relationship of the individual to the social order within which s/he communicates?

The theoretical views which will be contrasted in this paper are: 1) uncertainty reduction theory (Berger, Gardner, Parks, Schulman and Miller, 1976; and Berger and Calabrese, 1975); and 2) a communication competence model (Harris, 1979a; Harris, 1979b; Harris and Cronen, 1979) based on coordinated management of meaning theory (Pearce, 1976; Cronen and Pearce, 1978). The sponsors of both research programs have arrived at very different conclusions.

UNCERTAINTY REDUCTION THEORY

Uncertainty reduction is the ancestral term for a line of inquiry which assumes that information is a crucial resource for self maintenance and that the major communication process consists of seeking and using information in such a manner that a cognitive state of balance is reached (Heider, 1958). A balanced state is accomplished by reducing one's uncertainty concerning other's behavior either before (proactive attribution) or after (retroactive abbribution) has occurred so that it may be predicted and understood. When uncertainty is reduced to the point that behavior can be predicted, communication will be successful and enjoyable.

Communication itself plays a vital role in the reduction of uncertainty in that people must talk with others to gain information about themselves and their environment. Social activity is structured in such a way that one's discovery of its various patterned episodes can facilitate his/her prediction of their own and other's behaviors. It is the goal (whether conscious or not: see Berger, et al., 1978) of an actor to discover these social episodes so that s/he can know how to proceed in the mutual exchange of information. If there is no recognizable sequence of events or if the recognized pattern is perceived by the individual as wrong his/her uncertainty will be high. When uncertainty is high successful communication is difficult. For this reason people tend to seek others they perceive are similar to themselves in background, likes and dislikes, attitudes, etc. (Berger and Calabrese, 1975).

Initial Interactions and Information Sequencing

Initial interactions have been an important focus for study in Berger's work because they represent a point at which the uncertainty reduction process begins. Initial interactions are characterized as patterned contexts which are fairly familiar to most individuals. According to Berger and Calabrese

(1975) it is "central to the present theory...that when strangers meet, their primary concern is one of uncertainty reduction or increasing predictability about the behavior of both themselves and others in the interaction" (p. 100).

Berger draws the following conclusions concerning typical initial interactions based on some of his early research (Berger, et al., 1973): (1) the first few minutes are dominated by exchanges of demographic information; (2) "the preoccupation with demographic concerns suppresses the passing of other kinds of information until after the first few minutes"; (3) after about five minutes topics pertaining to attitudes, opinions and other persons tend to replace demographic information; (4) topics such as hobbies, personality, future plans, and past activities are either rare conversation topics... or they are relatively evenly distributed throughout the first 10 minutes of interaction." Berger argues that the exchange of demographic information functions to reduce uncertainty about other's opinions and attitudes. Once a communicator feels sufficiently certain about how to predict his/her partner based on inference from other's demographics he/she will proceed to suggest topics of a more personal nature without raising controversial ones. It should be noted that Berger is not arguing that demographic information is the only means by which uncertainty is reduced. He asserts rather that predictability is the crucial variable. People meeting at a political rally may begin their conversation with topics concerning political opinions. The context assures similarity of attitudes since the opinions exchanges are likely to be similar in orientation. Thus predictability of others will be high, uncertainty low, and pleasant conversations will necessarily follow. Berger et al., (1976) say that uncertainty reduction refers to two classes of knowledge; knowledge of transient states such as the emotions or feelings that a person may exhibit in response to particular situations and knowledge of

more stable characteristics such as values, likes and dislikes, etc.

It is expected that if each communicator finds the other attractive and willing to follow the rules of an initial interaction, they will extend their relationship onto a more intimate level (Berger, et al., 1976). Deviations from the predetermined sequence of events will elicit sanctions because such activity increases uncertainty. For instance, an interactant unable or unwilling to enact a socially normative episode will probably be perceived as unattractive (Berger et al., 1978) or mentally ill (Berger, et al., 1975) and the relationship will likely be terminated during this initial stage by his/her conversation partner.

The successful human actor then, according to Berger, is one who discovers all the nuances of the social patterns. Of particular importance is the ability to address topics according to rules established by the oral traditions of one's culture. This talent makes the actor predictable and therefore a good acting partner. One of the most prevalent traditions for information sequencing in our culture is represented in the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). A truly skilled performer will react appropriately to all antecedent messages. This means his/her management of conversations involves "revealing information of the same quality and rate" as his/her partner so that their disclosure patterns are matched (Berger et al., 1976). Specifically one actor will respond "in kind" to a fellow actor's inquiry to his/her state of health. The goal is to predict other's performances and to be predictable to one's partner. In achieving this goal the actor is perceived as talented (well socialized, normal) and an attractive partner for further friendly episodes.

Metatheoretical Stance: Society, Communication and Humankind: Berger, et al., implicitly characterize the human actor as a discoverer of the pre-existing

social order for purposes of prediction, understanding and control of self and other actors.

Successful communicators achieve uncertainty reduction through conformance to known social patterns such as the North American initial interaction sequence. The connection between the individual and the social pattern itself is clearly not a fully determined one. Berger (1976, p. 2) rejects the idea that human action is at the mercy of reinforcement contingencies. Thus the human actor may learn fail to learn, or choose to ignore the patterns of culture. But, while the relationship between the individual and the established social patterns is not a deterministic one, the relationship between individual performance and the perception of that performance is. If an individual performs in a way that violates socially normative practice, social attraction, perceived competence, etc. will be affected because the social order provides the consistency necessary to sustain uncertainty reduction. The role of theorist and researcher in this paradigm is in part to discover the lawful relationships between the social structure and perceptions which affect the reduction of uncertainty.

THE COORDINATED MANAGEMENT OF MEANING

The coordinated management of meaning theory (CMM) contends that each participant makes sense out of the messages that are produced and can produce messages that make sense to others. In so doing, persons attempt to create a coordinated conversation—coherent to each person and under the mutual control of both persons (Pearce, 1976; Cronen and Pearce, 1978; Cronen, Pearce, and Harris, 1979). Recent research in CMM has focused on the inter and intrapersonal logics by which individuals coordinate talk (Cronen, Pearce, and Snavely, 1979; Harris, Cronen, and McNamee, 1979; Harris, in press). An

aspect of CMM that has not received research attention is the model of communication competence derived from it. The competence model was first presented by Harris and Cronen (1979) and extended by Harris (1979a). This model differs markedly from the way Berger (1973) and various other competence models (Weimann, 1977; Hymes, 1972; Bochner and Kelly, 1974) express the relationships among persons, communication, and the social order. This model assumes that communication competence not only depends on the ability of actors to perform appropriately within the established rules of a social system but also upon their ability to mutually create new patterns of talk--patterns different from the ones they usually enact. Thus the Harris competence model is in the tradition of Berger and Luckman (1966) and Malinowski (1923) who emphasize the creative power of talk to destroy, maintain, and reconstitute social relationships. The model consists of the three "ideal types" based on the relation between the individual and the interpersonal system.

The Competence Model

Minimal Competence. The individual is unequal to the demands of an established social pattern. The actor does not know how to perform so as to create a coordinated episode. For example, a freshman may not know that at a social gathering of a political action group initial interactions usually start with affirmation of ideological commitment and exchanges of activist experiences, not exchanges of demographic information, an actor may fail to learn some but not all of the rules of performance for a particular episode such as the time sharing and topic control rules of initial interaction. Although a couple usually develops unique patterns of interaction that differ from those of the larger community (Leik, 1963; Jackson, 1965), some efforts to create new patterns may end in chaotic squabbles (Minuchin, 1974) if actors can't or won't coordinate their meanings.

Satisfactory Competence. The individual has the knowledge and ability to coordinate with another. Together, members of an interpersonal system satisfy the requirements of a cultural pattern or a pattern they have previously created by adopting their communication tactics to it. They have command of how to interpret the implications of a particular message in its context (Rommetviet, 1974), how to sequence information appropriately (Berger, et al., 1975) and how to manage the conversation cueing the other as to what will happen next weaving topics together into smooth flowing discourse (Harris, 1977). An individual whose abilities are best suited for adaptation may also tend to believe he or she should adapt to the requirements of the episode or to Other. Goffman (1959) refers to this belief as the fundamental rule in our society, "fit-in."

Optimal Competence. The optimally competent individual has the skills of a satisfactorily competent individual plus the knowledge for critiquing and altering an established episode. The optimally competent person can act and think at a level above the rules of the particular episode. Thus, optimal competence is comparable to Bateson's (1972) level III learning in which one has control over patterns of communication themselves, not merely control over choices allowed by the pattern. For example, a satisfactorily competent individual in an initial social interaction knows that he/she must stay on the level of demographic information at the beginning and can exercise choice over what particular demographic information would be appropriate response at a particular juncture. An optimally competent individual might choose to alter the pattern itself and attempt with his/her partner to create a new pattern that is not the socially normative one.

The optimally competent person is thus in a position to choose his/her relationship to the extant patterns of talk. S/he can choose to adapt to

the constraints of an established pattern or attempt to transform it. In no sense is it assumed that optimally competent communication consists of always choosing to break with an established pattern.

In this CMM model it is assumed that the competence of individuals and the type of system they create can vary from one episode to another. A particular person may be quite adept at creating open system episodes in face-to-face selling situations but produce enigmatic episodes with his/her spouse regarding child rearing practices. Minimal performance by both actors may produce a random (enigmatic) episode. Satisfactory performance by both may produce a closed (traditional and unnegotiable) episode. When each participant performs optimally, they are capable of creating an open (original and negotiated) episode type. These three episodes represent ideal system states (Harris, 1979b) and will vary when the performance level of the actors is asymmetrical. It should also be noted that the ability to produce a new pattern depends upon the cooperative efforts and abilities of at least two persons. If, for example, one person regards all of another's efforts at creative deviation as "mistakes" which he/she "corrects" by efforts to re-establish the usual pattern, a random episode may be the result. Our common experiences meeting socially inept, nervous, individuals illuminates how difficult it is to produce culturally normative episode such as initial interaction when one conversant does not know the rules.

The Concept of Optimal Competence in Modern Society

It is true that many societies have perpetuated patterns of social interaction that remain in force, exhibiting little deviation over many generations. Malinowsky (1976) has described how ideas of totemic division, kinship, and social duty produce uniformity in "savage society." In primitive societies like the very traditional[1] communities studied by Rogers and Shoemaker (1971)

satisfactory competence is all that is required--providing that community or society is not seriously penetrated by unsettling contacts with the outside (Sharp, 1977).

The situation for modern society is very different. The diversity of family patterns (Leik, 1963) forces many couples to negotiate new forms of family interaction unlike their families or origin (Minuchen, 1974). Research into the cycles of adult development in North America show that male and female life transitions are usually not syncronized due to both biological and cultural pressures (Levinson, 1978). Thus, patterns of interaction that are useful at one stage of a close personal relationship may be deleterious to one or both partners at another. Useful and enjoyable patterns established by partners may be upset because the modern close relationship is permeable to so many outside influences. Economic misfortune may, for example, upset a free-wheeling social life (Cherlin, 1979). One partner may become a convert to new political or religious creed forcing the couple to attempt new ways of interacting or face the dissolution of the relationship. Finally, modern society encourages a high level of expectation from close personal relationships. "'More personal fulfillment,' a common current demand, is an elusive idea which can take many forms" (Norton and Glick, 1979, p. 17). One effect of the various forces affecting relationships in modern society seems to be a legitimate distaste for patterns that produce the feeling of being enmeshed in a sequence of action beyond actors control (Cronen, Pearce, and Snavely, 1979).

Initial Interactions

The desire for close personal relations with a partner who can step outside traditional interaction patterns is recognized by recent research into modern equal-partner marriage styles. "The unique feature of this marriage

form," says Scanzoni (1978), "is that nothing is non-negotiable. Unlike in other marriage forms where certain things are prearranged, all issues are open to bargaining" (p. 31). Creating a equal partner relationship of course requires finding a partner who is capable of negotiating new patterns of relationship and who is not enmeshed in pre-established social roles. The ability to distance one's self from pre-established patterns and perhaps created coherent new ones can be suggested by one's conduct during initial interaction. Thus initial interactions can, in the CMM view, function as testing grounds wherein conversants demonstrate their abilities to comprehend the social order and indicate their relationship to that order--as fully enmeshed participants, or as creative social actors who can develop new patterns of conjoint action.

Aligning Actions and Levels of Competence

Competence, from the CMM point of view, requires skills to both perform well within pre-existing patterns (satisfactory competence) and to transcend pre-existing patterns (optimal competence). Stokes and Hewitt (1976) have proposed the concept of "aligning actions" as a way of understanding how actors can reduce the problematic relationship of their messages to an unfolding pattern of action. According to Stokes and Hewitt (1976), aligning actions are forms of conduct mainly verbal with which individuals accomplish two things: 1) they sustain the flow of joint action by bringing individual acts into line with one another and 2) they indicate the relationship between conduct and established cultural patterns. We associate satisfactory level competence with the aligning actions that signal the initiation of an established social pattern and the adjustment one message to another in conformance with that pattern. Minimal level competence we associate with the failure of conversants to align to the same pattern and/or failure to verbally

indicate the adjustment of one message to another. Below is a segment of conversation with and without satisfactory level aligning actions:

Satisfactory Alignment:

Lee: Are you from around here?
Pat: No. I'm from New York, are you?
Lee: Yea. I'm a native. You're pretty far from home. I have a son at Penn State. We go through New York when we visit...

No Alignment:

Lee: Are you from around here?
Pat: I'm from New York.
Lee: I'm a native. I have a son at Penn State.

The underlined words and phrases in the "satisfactory aligning" condition function to specifically acknowledge the previous message or invite a particular kind of response. In the "no aligning" (NA) condition connecting words and phrases that explicitly locate each message among others are removed. Optimal competence is associated with aligning actions that signal attempts to create an extra-normative pattern or initiate a meta-communication episode concurrent with the culturally normative pattern. In a concurrent meta-communication episode actors create role distance (Goffman, 1959) from an established pattern by commenting on their own performance and on the pattern they are enacting. For example:

Lee: Hi. My name is Lee. What's yours?
Pat: Hi Lee. Pat. I think your next question is supposed to be "Are you from around here?"
Lee: "Are you from around here?" or something like that (laugh).
Pat: Oh, what an "interesting" question...

In this paper we refer to aligning actions that initiate and maintain established patterns as "satisfactory aligning" (SA) and aligning actions that either orient actors to a concurrent meta-episode as "meta-aligning" (Meta A).

Metatheoretical Stance: Social Order, Communication, and Humankind

Cronen, Pearce, and Harris (1979) represent the social order as a fluid phenomenon composed of various interaction patterns (Hall, 1974) created by talk. Once created, a particular pattern may be used to guide talk but the patterns are mutable. A viable theory of communication should encompass the creation, alteration, and the maintenance of these patterns. Of course, conversants may act as if social patterns are inflexible and uphold these patterns for long periods of time. However, patterns of interaction do change and change most rapidly in modern society (Pearce, 1978). The connection between any particular kind of performance and perceptions of attraction, enjoyment of episodes, feelings of enmeshment, etc. are produced by various kinds of social experiences and negotiations. A fully normative performance might be preferred by members of a traditional community. However, among many college students at a large liberal university, it may well produce the undesirable feeling that participants are unattractively locked into--enmeshed--in a traditional pattern.

HYPOTHESES

This study employs two independent variables. The first, information sequencing, is derived from uncertainty reduction theory. Three types of sequencing were manipulated: 1) no movement toward greater intimacy (NM). This is socially normative for the first 2-3 minutes of initial interaction; 2) movement from low to high intimacy topics (L-H) which is not usual for the first 2-3 minutes; 3) high to low intimacy sequencing (H-L) which not only violated norms for the amount of movement toward intimacy in the early stages of interaction but also violates the direction of movement. The second independent variable derived from CMM research and the competence model is

aligning. Three types of alignment are manipulated: 1) no aligning (NA) where conversants fail to use aligning actions to move from topic to topic. It represents minimal competence; 2) satisfactory alignment (SA) in which conversants use the social convention of within-episode aligning actions to move from topic to topic and message to message. The SA condition thus represents satisfactory level competence; 3) meta-aligning (Meta A). This condition like the NA condition is a deviation from socially normative procedure. Conversants use meta-aligning to cue one another that they are either consciously choosing to follow the normative information sequencing procedure (Meta A/NM) or consciously choosing not to follow normative sequencing (Meta A/L-H and Meta A/H-L). In all instances of meta-aligning the conversants comment upon their pattern of talk, thus creating a concurrent episode of talk about the episode.

All hypothesized effects are limited in generality to the following situation: University students observing the first 2-3 minutes of initial social interaction.

Hypotheses Derived from Uncertainty Reduction Theory

H_1 There will be a significant main effect of information sequencing on the perceived communication competence of conversants such that competence in the NM condition will be perceived significantly higher than in the L-H condition, and competence in the L-H condition will be significantly higher than in the H-L condition.

Because the combination NM/SA represents the fully normative situation it can be usefully compared to the extra-normative "creative" conditions of NM/Meta A, L-H/Meta A, and H-L/Meta A. These preplanned comparisons speak directly to the difference between CMM and uncertainty reduction theory and are embodied in the hypotheses that have the form of the one below:

$H_{1.1}$ Perceived competence of actors in the fully normative NM/SA condition will be significantly higher than in the NM/Meta A; L-H/Meta A, and H-L/Meta A conditions.

H_2 There will be a significant main effect for information sequencing on the dependent variable perceived episode valence such that the valence of the normative NM condition is significantly higher than the L-H condition, and the L-H condition significantly higher than the H-L condition.

$H_{2.1}$ The perceived valence of the NM/SA condition will be substantially higher than the NM/Meta A, L-H/Meta A, and H-L/Meta A conditions.

H_3 There will be a significant main effect for information sequencing on the dependent variable social attraction such that the social attractiveness scores of a conversant will be higher in the NM condition than in the L-H condition, and higher in the L-H condition than in the H-L condition.

$H_{3.1}$ The social attractiveness scores of a conversant in the NM/SA condition will be significantly higher than in the NM/Meta A, L-H/Meta A, and H-L/Meta A conditions.

H_4 There will be a significant main effect for information sequencing on the dependent variable uncertainty--transient states such that a conversant is perceived more predictable in the NM than in the L-H or H-L conditions.

H_5 There will be a significant main effect for information sequencing on the dependent measure uncertainty--stable characteristics such that a conversant will be perceived significantly more predictable in the NM condition than in either the L-H or H-L conditions.

HYPOTHESES DERIVED FROM CMM THEORY

H_6 There will be a significant main effect for aligning action on the dependent variable perceived communication competence such that perceived competence scores will be higher in the meta-aligning condition (Meta A) than in the satisfactory aligning condition (SA), and higher in the satisfactory aligning condition (SA) than in the no aligning conditions (NA).

H_7 There will be a significant main effect for aligning on the dependent measure felt enmeshment such that conversants will be perceived significantly <u>less</u> enmeshed in the Meta A condition than in the SA condition, and significantly <u>less</u> enmeshed in the SA than in the NA condition.

$H_{7.1}$ Conversants in the NM/SA condition will be perceived to be significantly more enmeshed than in the NM/SA condition than in the NM/Meta A, L-H/Meta A, and H-L/Meta A conditions.

H_8 There will be a significant main effect for aligning on the dependent variable episode valence such that valence scores for the Meta A condition will be significantly higher than for the SA condition, and the SA condition significantly higher than for the NA condition.

H_9 There will be a significant main effect for aligning on the dependent variable social attraction such that a conversant in the Meta A condition will be perceived more socially attractive than in the SA condition, and more attractive in the SA than in the NA condition.

No interactive effects were hypothesized.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Operationalizing Independent Variables

Three types of sequencing and three levels of aligning were created by developing nine dialogues all representing a first social meeting of "Pat" and "Lee." These names were constructed to conceal sex identification. Pat is the target character. His/her performance varies according to the three levels of competence. Lee's performance is held constant with the potential for acting optimally. Pat follows Lee in the exchange of topics either without or with aligning actions in the minimal and satisfactory conditions. In the optimal condition, Pat initiates a meta episode with meta-aligning actions.

Information Sequencing. Three types of information sequencing were created from Berger et al's (1975) study which categorized 150 statements based on their temporal position in over two hours of initial interaction. Berger et al's results established that the topics could be reliably assigned to nine categories each representing a 15-minute time period. The ninth category was reserved for topics that would not occur during two hours of conversation between initial strangers. Only biographic-demographic items and "inconsequential opinions" (e.g., I'm from New York: I like hunting

antiques) occur in the first 15-minute period of time. Stimulus material was created by developing scripts of conversation between two persons "Pat" and "Lee" engaging in an initial interaction.

The topics introduced in their 3-minute (approximate) conversation produced one of three manipulated conditions: 1) a no movement condition (NM) in which the topics introduced remain at the lowest two levels of intimacy. They were randomly drawn from the topics in Berger et al's categories 1 and 2. 2) A low to high intimacy condition (L-H) was developed using topics randomly selected from each of the nine categories. These were incorporated in dialogue beginning with an exchange of two statements from category one and concluding with an exchange of statements from category nine (items of such intimacy that Berger et al conclude they would not occur in an initial interaction). Eighteen topics in all were used. 3) The third condition was a high to low intimacy sequencing condition (HL). It was the mirror image of the second condition. The same eighteen topics were used but the order of their appearance in the dialogue was reversed so that the script begins with 2 topics in category 9 (i.e., my son was arrested last night for possession of marijuana) and ends with topics in category 1 (i.e., I have a dog, three cats, and a parakeet). In all cases the wording of the topics introduced is identical to that contained in Berger et al (1975) with the exception of three minor wording changes needed to produce conversational continuity.

Aligning Actions. Three levels of aligning actions were manipulated in the dialogues: no alignment (NA), satisfactory alignment (SA) and meta-alignment (Meta A). These were operationalized as described earlier in the paper. The NA condition contained no efforts by the target character to connect a message to one preceeding or following it. In the SA condition both conversants use aligning actions to show how messages are related or to invite a

particular kind of response. In the Meta A condition the conversants not only align at the SA level, but also initiate a conversant communication episode in which they call attention to the pattern they are enacting and comment upon it. In the combination Meta A/NM conversants call attention to the fact that they are performing a "normal" first meeting and then comment on their performance. In the Meta A/L-H and Meta A/H-L condition, where topic sequencing violates the norm, the conversants explicitly align to an extra normative process "Let's not play the usual game and really get to know each other" and then proceed to comment on the process as the conversation processes.

Operationalizing the Dependent Variables

The dependent variables were: 1) perceived communication competence, 2) perceived enmeshment, 3) episode valence, 4) social attraction, 5) uncertainty-transient states and 6) uncertainty-stable characteristics.

Scales to measure perceived communication competence,[2] perceived enmeshment, and episode valence, and social attraction were developed by Harris (1976b) as part of a study run concurrent with this one. The scales and their internal reliabilities are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 about here

Social attraction was measured by the social attractiveness dimension of McCroskey and McCain's (1972) 3-dimensional attraction instrument. A new test of internal reliability for this subscale was run using 38 undergraduate Students. As in Harris's (1976b) reliability study Ss were asked to rate the social attractiveness of a target person in a dialogue not used in the main design of this study. The reliability of the attraction measure is also reported in Table 1.

The most problematic decision was choosing a measurement instrument for uncertainty. Clatterbuck's CLUES scale is used by Berger, but Prisbell (1978) had advanced data showing that that uncertainty is two-dimensional while CLUES is a unidimensional measure. Prisbell's scales also showed very high internal reliability for both dimensions (.89 and .92). Thus the dilemma; Berger describes uncertainty as two dimensional, but usually measures it as unidimensional (Berger, et al., 1976) the CLUES instrument would yield data more readily compared to Berger's own but might be an unfair test of Berger's position if it confounds independent judgments. It was decided to replicate Prisbell's study and use his scales if two independent factors again emerged.

Pilot Studies

Pilot Study No 1: Replication Test for Uncertainty Scales. A sample of 64 volunteer Ss from undergraduate communication courses at a large Eastern university was employed. Subjects were asked to recall a specific initial interaction at a social gathering over the last weekend, or if none occurred, to select the most recent specific social conversation with a stranger they could recall. Subjects rated the new acquaintance on Prisbell's scales shown in Table 2. Scales were randomized for polarity and order. The results of a factor analysis of results using varimax rotation are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 about here

These results supported the use of two separate measures of uncertainty. One for transient states (emotions, feelings, behaviors) and one for more stable characteristics (values, likes, dislikes).

Pilot Study No. 2: Assessing Stimulus Materials. A test of the manipulation of aligning actions was conducted. Five expert judges, each knowledgeable about the theory of CMM were instructed to categorize each of the nine dialogues according to written descriptions of the three system states (random, closed,

open) suggested by the competence model. No explicit references to aligning actions were contained in the instructions. All dialogues were assigned to the proper category. Since there was 100% agreement among judges no further statistical test was required.

A pretest was also conducted to make sure that the eighteen topics used from Berger's research would be perceived by a sample from our region the way Berger's sample did as part of a class exercise. Fourty-one undergraduates sorted the 18 selected topics and 10 other filler topics using Berger's nine categories. Results for the 18 selected topics matched Berger's original findings.

Subject and Procesures for Main Design

Subjects for the main design were 183 undergraduates enrolled in undergraduate communication courses at an Eastern university. None of these subjects participated in the pilot studies. Test booklets were distributed at the end of regular class periods to all those who volunteered for participation. Through the random distribution of the test booklet, each S was assigned to one of nine conditions. Three subjects were randomly deleted to create equal n.s.

Each test booklet contained a brief description of the study stating that this was a study of how people meet and come to know each other. The instructions told them that they were to read a dialogue of a conversation between "Pat" and "Lee" who meet for the first time and that after reading the dialogue they would be asked some questions about one of the conversants—Pat. Pat's name appeared underlined to remind Ss that Pat was the target person. After reading the dialogue, subjects encountered the set of scales with instructions. The order in which scales appeared was randomized.

Data Analysis for Main Design

The design was a 3 x 3 fully randomized ANOVA. The use of an ANOVA design parallels Berger's original studies of information sequencing. Alpha was set at .05. The Neuman-Keuls test was chosen for any a posteriori tests required. Preplanned a priori contrasts among particular cell were performed by t-test (see Kirk, 1968). Omega Square (W^2) statistic was selected for assessing the magnitude of experimental effects.

RESULTS

The results of F-max tests showed that the data met homogeneity of variance requirements for all conditions. Table 3 and 4 summarize the data for each dependent measure.

Tables 3 and 4 about here

Hypotheses Derived from Uncertainty Reduction Theory

Hypothesis 1. The results strongly support a main effect for information sequencing on perceived communication competence ($F = 5.183$, $df = 2/179$, $p < .007$). The direction of mean differences for levels of the main effect was as predicted by uncertainty reduction theory. A posteriori comparisons show significant differences among all three levels of information sequencing (see Table 3).

Hypothesis 1.1: The hypothesized superiority of the fully normative NM/SA condition over the NM/Meta A, L-HS/Meta A, and H-LS/Meta A conditions for perceived communication competence was not supported (see Table 4. Results of the pre-planned comparison between the no movement information sequencing, satisfactory aligning condition and the no movement information sequencing/meta aligning condition was significant (critical diff = 1.177, $p < .05$). However, the direction of the significant difference is inconsistent

with the prediction derived from uncertainty reduction theory (see Table 3).

Hypothesis 2: This hypothesis did not receive support. The effect of topic sequencing on the dependent variable episode valence approached significance at the $p < .1$ level ($F = 2.343$, df = 2/179. As shown in Table 3 the direction of mean differences is not consistent with uncertainty reduction theory.

Hypothesis 2.1: The hypothesized superiority of the NMS/SA condition over the NMS/MA, L-HS/Meta A, and H-LS/Meta A conditions was not supported for the dependent measure episode valence. Results of pre-planned comparisons do show statistically significant differences between the NM/SA condition and all the other conditions but the direction of differences is the opposite of that predicted by uncertainty reduction theory (see Tables 3 and 4).

Hypothesis 3: No significant main effect was found for information sequencing on the dependent measure of social attraction ($F = 1.292$, df = 2/179, p = n.s.). Mean differences were, however, in direction hypothesized (see Table 3).

Hypothesis 3.1: Results of the three pre-planned comparisons failed to support the predicted superiority of the NMS/SA condition over the NMS/Meta A, L-HS/Meta A and H-LS/Meta A conditions (see Table 4). Mean trends were not in the direction predicted by uncertainty reduction theory (see Table 3).

Hypothesis 4: The hypothesized main effect of information sequencing on the dependent measure uncertainty-transient states was not supported ($F = .736$, df = 2/179, n.s.).

Hypothesis 5: This hypothesis predicted a significant main effect of information sequencing on the dependent variable uncertainty--stable characteristics. This H was not supported although the data approached significance

($F = 2.436$, $df = 2/179$, $p < .09$). The direction of mean difference is not consistent with the predicted superiority of the NM condition.

Hypotheses Derived from the CMM Theory Competence Model

Hypothesis 6: The results supported the hypothesized main effect of management level on the dependent variable perceived communication competence ($F = 13.381$, $df = 2/179$, $p < .001$). A Newman-Keuls a posteriori test showed that differences for levels of the main effect were in the direction predicted by the competence model; the no alignment condition (NA) was judged significantly less competent than the satisfactory alignment (SA) condition, and the satisfactory alignment condition was judged significantly less competent than the meta-alignment (Meta A) condition (see Table 3).

Hypothesis 7: There was strong support for the hypothesized main effect of management level on the dependent variable felt enmeshment. ($F = 20.143$, $df = 2/179$, $p < .001$). The mean trend was as predicted with significant differences between the NA and SA conditions, and between the SA and Meta A conditions (see Table 3).

Hypothesis 7.1: The hypothesized enmeshing effect of no-movement information ordering combined with satisfactory alignment received some support (see Tables 3 and 4). The results of the three pre-planned comparisons show that the no movement-satisfactory aligning condition was perceived to be significantly more enmeshing than either the no movement-meta aligning condition or the low to high intimacy sequencing condition. The comparison of no movement information ordering and satisfactory alignment condition with the high to low intimacy ordering and optimal aligning condition failed to reach statistical significance (see Table 4).

Hypothesis 8: The main effect for alignment level on the dependent variable episode valence was also significant ($F = 26.283$, $df = 2/179$, $p < .001$).

Means for levels of the main effect were in the predicted direction (see Table 3) with significant differences among all three alignment levels.

Hypothesis 1: The hypothesized effects for management levels on the dependent variable social attraction were not supported. There was a significant main effect ($F = 12.675$, $df = 2/179$, $p < .001$). However, significant differences were obtained between NA and SA conditions, but were not found between the SA and Meta A conditions (see Table 3).

Serendipitous Findings

There was an unpredicted significant main effect for topic sequencing on enmeshment ($F = 4.196$, $df = 2/179$, $p < .02$).

The low to high disclosure sequence was significantly more enmeshing than the high to low sequence. The no movement sequencing did not differ significantly from the two other levels (see Table 3). There was also an unanticipated main effect that approached statistical significance. Performance level approached statistically significant effect on the dependent measure uncertainty-transient states ($F = 2.685$, $df = 2/179$, $p < .08$). No other significant or near significant ($p < .1$) results were observed for main or interactive effects.

Magnitude of Experimental Effects and Power Analyses

The magnitude of experimental effects was estimated for all statistically significant effects and for those approaching significance ($p < .1$). Estimates of magnitude were made using Omega^2 (see Table 5). Power analyses of all nonsignificant ($p > .05$) findings are reported in Table 6.

Tables 5 and 6 about here

Post Hoc Reliability Analysis

A post hoc study of scale reliabilities based on data from the main design

was performed. All dependent measures showed reliabilities beyond the psychometric criterion of .70 (see Table 1).

DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to compare aspects of two contrasting theories. The value of the data produced is not that they represent a definitive test of the two theories--they do not. Obviously there are many aspects of both conceptions that are not addressed in this single study. However, the data are quite suggestive about the underlying question: What is the relationship of the individual to the social order in which he/she communicates? The results obtained do not support the lawful relationships between normative performance and positive evaluations that Berger and his coworkers proposed. Moreover, the data indicate a preference for partners who indicate an ability to transcend established patterns.

The data show that subjects in our sample, representing students at a large Eastern university rated a conversant exhibiting the ability to negotiate an extra normative episode significantly higher in communication competence than the conversant in the normative aligning condition. Meta alignment also produced significantly lower perceptions of enmeshment, and significantly more positive feelings about the episode than did normative aligning actions. This is important because communication competence, freedom from enmeshment, and personally fulfilling interaction, are judgments central to the formation of modern close personal relationships. The results of the preplanned comparisons are particularly supportive of the CMM position. In no case was the fully normative condition (NM/SA) most preferred by subjects. It is striking that results for the dependent variable episode valence show that Ss in this study preferred episodes with very gross violations of information sequencing

norms over socially normative sequencing when the actor indicates that he/she is deliberately aligning to an unusual episode and not just failing to follow norms. These findings of preference for extra-normative sequencing are particularly noteworthy when one considers that the manipulations include topics that do not usually come up in 2 hours of conversation let alone the first 2 minutes. We conclude that in initial interactions persons can violate social expectations about information sequencing without penalty and on some counts with substantial gain if they succeed in aligning with Other to an extra-normative pattern.

The one seeming anomoly to this pattern of findings is the effect for social attraction. Although the mean trend suggests the superiority of creative, meta-alignment, no significant difference was obtained between it and the satisfactory alignment condition. It may be that the McCroskey-McCain scales which measure only the potential of a conversant as a social friend are not sensitive to the potential of a conversant for a close personal relationship. It is possible that one could be judged a potential friend, a good fit for one's circle of friends, and easy to talk with, without being creative. However, the desire to form a close personal relationship--which is not tapped by these scales--should be more closely related to the other variables.

None of the foregoing suggests that Berger and his associates have failed to accurately identify social norms for information sequencing or that information sequencing is unimportant. Information sequencing had significant effects on both perceived competence and felt enmeshment, and approached significance on two other variables. Examining mean trends, we see that the single most preferred condition for perceived competence, felt enmeshment, social attraction, and uncertainty-transient states is the combination of

socially normative no-movement information sequencing and socially creative meta-alignment. The relationship of levels of aligning action to information sequencing types thus tends to be a simple additive not interactive one. Ss in this study tended to prefer normative information sequencing if the conversants indicated that they were choosing to use the norm and not tied to it. Information sequencing also had significant effects on felt enmeshment. High to low sequencing was more enmeshing than the normative no movement condition. This may be because the movement to more and more trivial information gives the effect of closing off the relationship.

The failure to find a significant relationship between information sequencing and uncertainty about stable characteristics should not count heavily against the importance of the information sequencing variable. Low power may be the reason that the effect only approaches significance at the .1 level. The short duration of the experimental episode may also inhibit the ability of sequencing to exert its effects.

Of course we do not believe that the tendency to prefer alignments to extra normative episodes reflects a cognitive or social law. We began with the observation that student subjects constitute a community particularly receptive to innovative social action. Another community may prohibit the role-distancing of meta-alignments in initial interactions or other episodes. The rules of a particular collectivity may specify that all deviations count as "snubbing the social order."

In summary, these data suggest taking a new look at the relationships among persons, communication, and the social order. The older conceptualization guiding uncertainty reduction research assumes that the fully developed person is one who knows and performs well within pre-established patterns of the social order. We have argued that modern society has made salient new skills--

skills by which persons distance themselves from established patterns and negotiate new ones. The image that emerges is not the antithesis of Berger's view but an extension of it. We suggest a reciprocal relationship between communication and the social order. In our view, communication creates patterns of social order and those created patterns may, in turn, be used by conversants to guide talk.

FOOTNOTES

[1] By "traditional societies" we mean those that match the criteria developed by Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971. Their emphasis on role fixedness and role-taking ability is particularly instructive.

[2] Wiemann's (1977) competence scales were available, however, the data is unclear as to whether Wiemann's scale is unidimensional or not. Harris's scales used here are from a larger set that was found to be clearly unidimensional (Harris, 1979b).

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Table 1

INTERNAL RELIABILITIES FOR DEPENDENT MEASURES

	RELIABILITIES	
	PRETEST	POST HOC
Communication Competence (Each item followed by a 9-step "strongly agree" to strongly disagree scale.)	.72	.71
Person 1 could not only predict how the episode would go, s/he could also experiment with new strategies without causing confusion.		
Person 1 understood this situation very well.		
Person 1 was highly competent in this episode.		
Episode Valence (Each item followed by a 9-step "strongly agree" to strongly disagree scale.)	.85	.83
This episode is one Person 1 very much desires to have occur.		
Person 1 enjoys participating in this episode very much.		
Enmeshment (Each item followed by a 9-step "strongly agree" to strongly disagree scale.)	.80	.78
Doing this episode over and over seems out of Person 1's control, it just seems to happen.		
Person 1 feels stuck in this episode.		
This situation seems to act out of hand for Person 1.		

(Table 1 continued)

	RELIABILITIES	
	PRETEST	POST HOC
Social Attraction (All items followed by a 7-step "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" scale.)	.82	.75
I would be pleased to have person 1 as a friend.		
I think it would be difficult to meet and talk to Person 1.		
I could never establish a personal friendship with Person 1.		
Person 1 is offensive to me.		
Person 1 just wouldn't fit into my circle of friends.		
Uncertainty - Transient States (Each item followed by a 7-step "extremely well" to "not at all" scale.)	.79	.82
How well can you predict Person 1's behavior?		
How well can you predict Person 1's emotional states?		
How well do you understand Person 1's feelings?		
How well do you understand Person 1's judgements?		
Uncertainty - Stable Characteristics (Each item followed by a 7-step "extremely well" to "not at all" scale.)	.81	.80
How well do you know Person 1's interests?		
How well can you predict Person 1's attitudes/values?		
How well do you know Person 1's likes/dislikes?		

Subjects were instructed that "Pat" was Person 1.

Table 2

VARIMAX ROTATED FACTOR ANALYSIS OF PRISBELL'S UNCERTAINTY SCALES

ITEM	FACTOR I	FACTOR II
How well can you predict this persons behavior?	.727	.156
How well do you know this person?[a]	-.124	.391
How well can you predict this person's emotional states?	.660	.280
How well do you understand this person's feelings?	.617	-.153
How well can you predict this person's decisions?[b]	.581	-.173
How well do you know this person's interests?	.222	.676
How well can you predict this person's attitudes/values?	-.150	.609
How well do you know this person's likes/dislikes?	-.026	.885
How well do you understand this person's judgements?	.747	-.072
How well can you predict this person's responses?[a]	-.405	.208

[a] Items deleted from final instrument due to failure to load at our .5 criterion on either factor.

[b] Scale deleted from final instrument because of questionable face validity.

Eigen Values: Factor I = 2.13, Factor II = 1.20

Table 3

MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

FOR ALL TREATMENT CONDITIONS

Perceived Communication Competence (lower scores indicate increased competence)	No Aligning (NA)	Satisfactory Aligning	Meta Aligning (Meta A)	Main Effects
No Movement (NM)	$\bar{x}$=5.050 SD=1.806	$\bar{x}$=4.075 SD=2.208	$\bar{x}$=2.525 SD=1.164	$\bar{x}$=3.883[a] SD=2.034
Low to High Intimacy (L-H)	$\bar{x}$=4.925 SD=2.079	$\bar{x}$=4.975 SD=1.983	$\bar{x}$=4.310 SD=1.933	$\bar{x}$=4.566 SD=1.991
High to Low Intimacy (H-L)	$\bar{x}$=6.150 SD=2.072	$\bar{x}$=4.775 SD=1.957	$\bar{x}$=3.274 SD=1.253	$\bar{x}$=4.982[b] SD=1.991
Main Effects	$\bar{x}$=5.375[a] SD=2.033	$\bar{x}$=4.442[b] SD=2.038	$\bar{x}$=3.608[c] SD=1.673	
Perceived Enmeshment (lower scores indicate more enmeshment)				
No Movement (NM)	$\bar{x}$=4.100 SD=1.910	$\bar{x}$=5.175 SD=2.494	$\bar{x}$=7.250 SD=1.990	$\bar{x}$=5.508 SD=2.488
Low to High Intimacy	$\bar{x}$=3.750 SD=2.191	$\bar{x}$=6.000 SD=1.908	$\bar{x}$=6.976 SD=1.374	$\bar{x}$=6.271[a] SD=1.890

(Table 3 continued)

Perceived Enmeshment (lower scores indicate more enmeshment) (continued)	No Aligning (NA)	Satisfactory Aligning	Meta Aligning (Meta A)	Main Effects
High to Low Intimacy (H-L)	$\bar{x}$=3.750 SD=1.881	$\bar{x}$=5.750 SD=1.817	$\bar{x}$=6.290 SD=2.023	$\bar{x}$=5.246[b] SD=2.174
Main Effects	$\bar{x}$=4.550[a] SD=2.162	$\bar{x}$=5.642[b] SD=2.087	$\bar{x}$=6.850[c] SD=1.823	
Episode Valence (lower scores indicate more positive valence)				
No Movement (NM)	$\bar{x}$=6.875 SD=2.259	$\bar{x}$=4.825 SD=1.915	$\bar{x}$=3.300 SD=1.436	$\bar{x}$=5.000 SD=2.381
Low to High Intimacy (L-H)	$\bar{x}$=4.925 SD=2.551	$\bar{x}$=4.375 SD=1.798	$\bar{x}$=3.357 SD=2.157	$\bar{x}$=4.205 SD=2.252
High to Low Intimacy (H-L)	$\bar{x}$=6.175 SD=2.478	$\bar{x}$=3.850 SD=1.920	$\bar{x}$=3.158 SD=1.803	$\bar{x}$=4.415 SD=1.646
Main Effects	$\bar{x}$=5.992[a] SD=2.525	$\bar{x}$=4.350[b] SD=1.890	$\bar{x}$=3.275[c] SD=1.800	

(Table 3 continued)

Social Attraction (lower scores indicate more attractiveness)	No Aligning (NA)	Satisfactory Aligning (SA)	Meta Aligning (Meta A)	Main Effects
No Movement (NM)	$\bar{x}$=4.786 SD=1.239	$\bar{x}$=3.538 SD=1.447	$\bar{x}$=3.163 SD=1.604	$\bar{x}$=3.829 SD=1.577
Low to High Intimacy (L-H)	$\bar{x}$=4.750 SD=1.489	$\bar{x}$=3.575 SD=1.469	$\bar{x}$=3.500 SD=1.585	$\bar{x}$=3.934 SD=1.598
High to Low Intimacy (H-L)	$\bar{x}$=4.875 SD=1.413	$\bar{x}$=4.138 SD=1.873	$\bar{x}$=3.776 SD=1.496	$\bar{x}$=4.271 SD=1.646
Main Effects	$\bar{x}$=4.804[a] SD=1.361	$\bar{x}$=3.750[b] SD=1.605	$\bar{x}$=3.475[b] SD=1.557	
Uncertainty-Transient States (lower scores indicate less uncertainty)				
No Movement (NM)	$\bar{x}$=5.067 SD=1.113	$\bar{x}$=3.866 SD=1.461	$\bar{x}$=3.783 SD=1.136	$\bar{x}$=4.239 SD=1.360
Low to High Intimacy (L-H)	$\bar{x}$=4.267 SD=1.547	$\bar{x}$=4.250 SD=1.261	$\bar{x}$=3.952 SD=1.301	$\bar{x}$=4.153 SD=1.359
High to Low Intimacy (H-L)	$\bar{x}$=4.066 SD=1.383	$\bar{x}$=4.017 SD=1.896	$\bar{x}$=3.983 SD=1.194	$\bar{x}$=4.023 SD=1.449
Main Effects	$\bar{x}$=4.467 SD=1.405	$\bar{x}$=4.044 SD=1.543	$\bar{x}$=3.906 SD=1.197	

(Table 3 continued)

Uncertainty-Stable Characteristics (lower scores indicate less uncertainty)	No Aligning (NA)	Satisfactory Aligning	Meta Aligning (Meta A)	Main Effects
No Movement (NM)	$\bar{x}$=4.417 SD=1.265	$\bar{x}$=4.117 SD=1.065	$\bar{x}$=3.467 SD=1.386	$\bar{x}$=4.000 SD=1.458
Low to High Intimacy (L-H)	$\bar{x}$=3.417 SD=. 829	$\bar{x}$=3.700 SD=1.008	$\bar{x}$=3.778 SD=1.271	$\bar{x}$=3.634 SD=1.050
High to Low Intimacy (H-L)	$\bar{x}$=4.317 SD=1.379	$\bar{x}$=3.917 SD=1.467	$\bar{x}$=4.193 SD=1.124	$\bar{x}$=4.141 SD=1.322
Main Effects	$\bar{x}$=4.050 SD=1.247	$\bar{x}$=3.911 SD=1.371	$\bar{x}$=3.807 SD=1.280	

Main effects with different subscripts differ significantly from one another ($P<.05$).
All A Posteriori comparisons among main effects are by Neumann-Keuls procedure.

Table 4

A PRIORI CONTRASTS

Condition Contrasted With NM/SA	DEPENDENT MEASURES: Perceived Communication Competence[a]	Enmeshment[b]	Valence[c]	Attraction[d]
Meta A/NM	$P<.05$	$P<.05$	$P<.05$	N.S.
Meta A/L-H	N.S.	$P<.05$	$P<.05$	N.S.
Meta A/H-L	N.S.	N.S.	$P<.05$	N.S.

Critical differences for t: a= 1.177, b= 1.234, c= 1.240, d= .953. All tests two-tailed.

Table 5

OMEGA^2 ESTIMATES OF PERCENTAGE OF VARIANCE ACCOUNTED FOR

Globe| Competence		Enmeshment	
Aligning	12%	Aligning	18%
Information Sequencing	4%	Information Sequencing	4%
Social Attraction		Uncertainty-Transient States	
Aligning	14%	Aligning	3%
Valence		Uncertainty-Stable Characteristics	
Aligning	17%	Information Sequencing	3%

Table 6

POWER OF THE MAIN DESIGN[a]

	FOR SMALL EFFECT SIZE (.10)	FOR MODERATE EFFECT SIZE (.20)
MAIN EFFECTS	.21	.86
INTERACTIVE EFFECTS	.09	.38

a = .05, Design = 3 x 3, Fully Randomized ANOVA, N = 180